

Empower our educators and watch our students excel

SUE HILDICK
IN MY OPINION

January is often a month of hope and aspirations as we anticipate the beginning of a new year. But as news of Oregon's national ranking in student achievement and high school graduation hit the spotlight, my hope dropped. The simple truth is we are failing our children by not delivering a first-class education system.

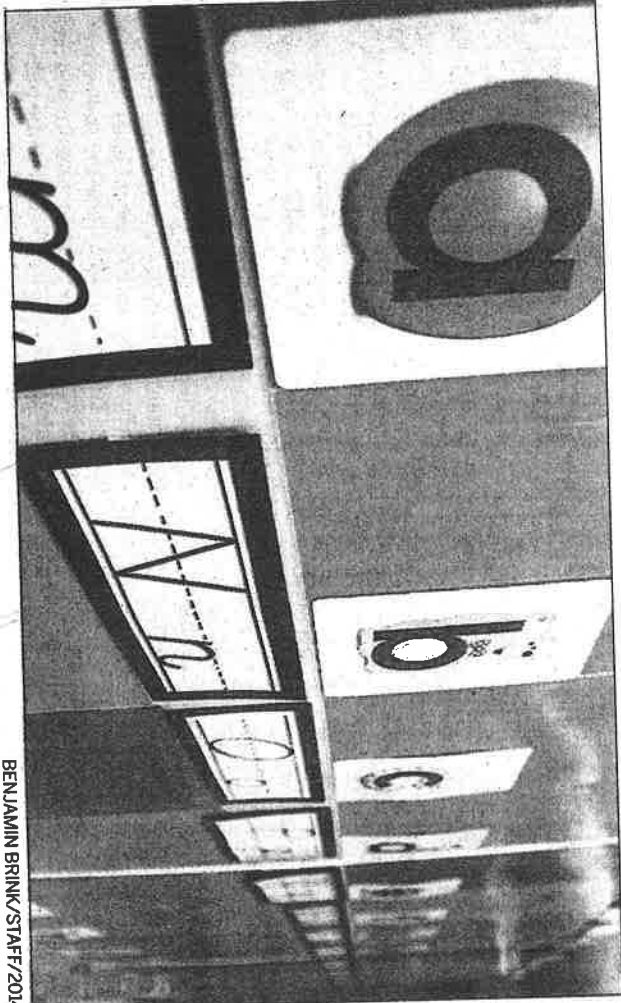
Every child can learn, regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. And while many aspects play into a child's ability to thrive and succeed, we know that teachers are the No. 1 in-school factor that determines student success.

Chalkboard Project's work centers on the classroom teacher. We have learned – and have a significant impact on student achievement. Our work with more than 40 districts has clearly shown that if you empower teachers and establish the right teaching conditions, student achievement will increase substantially. These districts have consistently outperformed other districts in closing achievement gaps, increasing student achievement and, on average, attaining higher graduation rates than the state average. In fact, an independent analysis showed that if the results of our Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success (CLASS) districts were scaled across the state, Oregon would rank in the top 10 of the highest-performing states in the nation, and we would attain a 100 percent high school graduation rate two years earlier than projected. Our organization strongly believes that if

we invest in the right support and training for our teachers and school-building leaders, we will close the persistent achievement gaps and improve student achievement. To do this we must invest in our educator workforce. Our efforts must focus on workforce policies and practices and on funding decisions that improve the quality of teaching and learning. We must be strategic about our investments and make sure we are investing in strategies that result in student achievement gains. And we must ensure these investments span the entire educator career pathway – from teacher preparation to school leadership.

As we enter the legislative session, we must ask whether we are offering the right kind of training and support to our educators and whether our investments in the profession are strategic or insufficiently funded. The short answer is no.

We have a serious disconnect between our goals and implementation plans. I call this Oregon's "implementation gap." We have failed to ensure that we have sufficient funding to align our strategic investments with the capacity of our teachers to carry them out. From teaching to new standards to using new state assessments and a new evaluation system that includes measuring how students are learning, teachers have not received adequate training and support to meet these needs. And soon we will be expanding our pre-K and kindergarten programs. Once again, we will be asking our educators to deliver results without providing them the training and support they will need to be successful. Currently, the governor's budget allo-



cates about \$37 million to support teachers and school leaders. Chalkboard is advocating for \$55 million. But with the most recent news, we have a greater sense of urgency. For that reason, we may seek an even larger investment to ensure we scale key teacher supports – such as relevant training on the new performance evaluation system, stronger professional development around the new standards and state assessments, mentors for all first- and second-year teachers, and teacher preparation programs that grow a diverse and culturally responsive teacher workforce.

Chalkboard puts a high priority on listening to the voices of educators as we think about education transformation. We have been privileged to learn from educators through our pilot projects and know unequivocally that supporting them to improve and adjust their practice will yield results for all children in Oregon. We believe that educator workforce issues must become top strategic priorities for Oregon, not an afterthought to our investment strategies.

Sue Hildick is president of the nonprofit Chalkboard Project.

Share your opinion

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